

Marriage Customs in Belgium.

Gorgeous Religious Fetes—Appearance of the Belgic People—The Army and Young Men—What Antwerp Does for the Poor.

By
Belle Kearney.

THE Hotel de Ville is the splendid city hall, or house of justice for Antwerp. From 10 to 12 o'clock on Saturday mornings, civil marriage ceremonies are performed there. As one reaches the Grand Place, or open square, with the quaint, old guild houses surrounding the famous statue which celebrates the opening of the Scheldt, he beholds a vast array of carriages, all black and solemn looking, drawn up in state before the Hotel de Ville. From these emerge one bridal party after another, who slowly ascend the marble steps and enter one of the three halls where the marriage ceremonies are to be performed. Policemen with silver mountings on their uniforms stand punctiliously around, besides officers in civilians' clothes. At the entrance to the different halls the brides and groom-elect are met by an usher dressed in black with knee breeches and low shoes with large, square, silver buckles. There is a great rosette on one shoulder from which fall numerous ends of black ribbon. An immaculate white vest adds to the imposing appearance, and a necktie which is fluted and fan-shaped and snowy. This dignitary is accompanied by a charming, diminutive page, scarcely 5 years of age, who is also dressed in black,

with knee pants and white vest; and on one of his shoulders is a huge, white rosette with white streamers. These pages wear sunny-brown wigs of long hair falling about the collar and ears, but cropped short over the eyebrows. These little fellows are busy keeping the brides' trains in order. The apparel of the latter varies according to station and age. The young and wealthy ones wear superb white costumes of lace, silk and satin, with long veils, crowned with orange blossoms, and carry bouquets of the same flowers in their hands. The older ones wear black dresses—some elaborate, others with elaborate orange blossoms, as do all of the bridesmaids. As soon as a bridal party enters a hall, the members are shown to seats which have been reserved for them, one after another, as rapidly as possible, the couples move up to the front bench, behind which is seated the official who performs the ceremony. A low murmur is heard and the newly-married couple move away from the desk and pass through a side door, down the staircase, into a carriage waiting. In one hall, seats with velvet cushions are placed around the walls. One day, upon visiting the Hotel de Ville, I saw a number of exquisitely attired young ladies in this place waiting for their turn to be married. The

small pages very gallantly seated each on the cushions and placed her train of black, lace and tulle in a white fluffy basket beside her. The brides stood guard. There was barely a suggestion of a smile; all was stiff, cold, funeral. In one of the chambers, wedding marches are played on an unseen organ as the couples march down the aisle and approach the official desk. Puffed in the unreserved seats, and standing behind the marble banisters in the hallways, are spectators.

Only Civil Marriages Legal.

Only civil marriages are legal in Belgium, as in many other European countries. The public authorities do the ceremony is a safeguard for women. Before a marriage is solemnized the closest inquiry is made into the lives of those who desire to be wedded. No license is required, but, at the celebration of the nuptials, a little book is given in which it is certified that the marriage is legal, with all the other necessary forms, and a record kept by the officials. If the book is lost or stolen, the man or woman can have it replaced. If the marriage takes place in the home of the bride, the priest or priestess, the marriage is solemnized in the same way and the doors of the palaces have to be left ajar for witnesses to enter. In consequence of this openness, and the scrutiny of the records of the contracting parties previous to marriage, there are very few divorces in Belgium. It would be well for other nations to follow this admirable plan.

Gorgeous Religious Fetes.

The Virgin is the patron saint of Antwerp. The magnificent cathedral in that ancient city is dedicated to her. Once a year a dazzling fete is held in honor of the Assumption of Mary. It begins the Saturday before the 15th of August with a torchlight procession. The crowds are tremendous, and the festival occurs on Sunday, while many bands are playing. On Monday celebrations are held in the churches and there are parades from 8 a. m. to 10 p. m. That night there is a great display of the daylight demonstrations, with the addition of torches and floats representative of certain historical incidents. Tuesday is devoted to the festival of the Assumption of Mary, and, in the evening, fireworks and illuminations. Business houses are closed the first three days of the week and all trades cease, not to begin until the next Wednesday morning. The following Saturday night there are processions, illuminations and concerts as on the first. The second Sunday after the 15th of August is dedicated to the feast of the Assumption of Mary, and of all the feast ones. Celebrations are performed in the cathedral and churches, and about 10 o'clock a high altar is erected in the Place de Meir and there mass is held with all the surroundings of splendid decorations in crimson and cloth of gold. An hour later there is an imposing procession; scores of priests in their different garbs, numbers of boys in the white surplices and red habit of the altar, and others in ordinary Sunday apparel; hundreds of citizens in solemn black, all holding candles, file by them. Then appear a company bearing a multitude of gorgeous banners, with the devices of the Roman Catholic church wrought in silver and gold upon them. Then comes a group of men holding aloft a four-posted frame on which rests a figure of the Virgin draped in a shimmering robe of yellow satin, embroidered in crimson and embellished with silver and gold. On its head is a crown of solid gold, set with diamonds, that cost \$3,000. Then follows another bearing a paramour of boys, priests and citizens, carriers of more resplendent banners, and behind them is seen a canopy below which is the host; and under it is a bishop religiously counting his beads, surrounded by other high ecclesiastics. At this spectacle, the people, as one man, mend their knees and uncover their heads.

The Assumption of the Virgin.

That summer morning in Antwerp, as I stood with the masses in the glare of the sun to behold the gorgeous pageant, there was a deep sign from the multitude that had been standing for hours in the awakening sun, the scrambling, crowding each other selfishly and being thrust butially upon the sidewalks by the policemen who had placed their backs to the crowd and forced them into the desired positions; men, women and children in one seething crush. There was a gradual unpacking of the people, first angry, who dispersed about the streets, beating under their feet the remnants of flowers which had been scattered there by the hands of women before the demonstrations began. All of this has been going on for 820 years—these festivals and processions—ever since the Jesuits conceived the idea of instituting the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin, and the people have obediently believed, or pretended to believe, during all that time that Mary ascended into heaven just as Jesus did. Fifty years ago, the pope, at the instigation of the Jesuits, established the dogma of the immaculate Conception of the Virgin. The Roman Catholics accepted it and now declare that Mary had the same divine origin as Christ. In honor of this, on the Sunday nearest the 21st of August, there are illuminations of the churches, as well as the dwellings of the faithful, and there is the repetition of the historical procession of the preceding Monday night. There are 2,000 convents and monasteries in Belgium—all are called convents. There are between 25,000 and 30,000 nuns and monks. An air of hopelessness pervades the whole country. The priests are everywhere—dressed according to their station—from the barefoot, brown-robed monks of the Franciscan order, to the fat, sleek, jolly young brothers who train boys for their first communion. Nuns are also everywhere. The glint of their rosaries is seen amid the folds of their black gowns, as they go upon the streets; and in the Convent of the Sacred Heart all day there are to be found two nuns, dressed in pure white, kneeling before the altar praying. As the hours close, two others come and take their places behind those who have been kneeling; and, as the latter stand away, the two who have recently knelt, still upon their knees, and thus is kept up a perpetual adoration. Every afternoon, in the exquisite chapel, the whole community of white-robed nuns are seated together to pray and sing, while a priest officiates. In their midst are seen, here and there, sisters with black garbs under their white veils; these are the workers. These, dressed in white, or cream color, from veil to slippers, come from wealthy families and spend their days wholly in prayer and song and in taking care of the altar. In the great hospitals, the nuns act as nurses. In the chapels, at sunset, can be heard the drone of their voices, as they congregate for worship, with their work-aprons still tied about their waists and their great head-dresses flaring above their sombre habits. The churches and cathedrals of Belgium are magnificent beyond all description; positively stupendous in their wealth of accumulated paintings by the old masters; their exquisite statuary in Italian marble executed by the world's best workmen; their marvelous wood carvings, the perfect expression of the genius and devotion of heaven-born brains and divinely-touched hands of men who lived and worked centuries ago. Often, in the leading to these churches and cathedrals are scenes of poverty and filth,

Children in rags and dirt play in groups in an atmosphere stifling with offensiveness, while men and women move through the foul passageways mechanically, with drawn lips and stony eyes.

Appearance of the Belgic People.

The Belgic people are generally undersized, swarthy, and have sad, unsmiling faces. They show very plainly the mixture of French, Spanish and Dutch blood. The Roman Catholics in the state church, and the church and state are practically one in Belgium. Although the Liberal party was in power only from 1874 to 1881, in the world of politics it did much towards keeping down an absolutism and giving a certain tone of impartiality to the administration of public affairs. For instance, the government always assists in the building of churches, whether of Jews, Protestants or Catholics; if the numbers of the several congregations have grown as large as 200, and it aids in paying the ministers of every denomination and helps to build their parsonages.

Belgium a Government by the People.

Belgium has a government by the people. If the Liberal and Socialist elements were to get together and say to the king that he must go, his reign would cease. They could establish a new government. The Socialists are thought to be the strongest of the representatives; they hold the balance of power. In the manufacturing towns of Belgium, where the miseries of the people are greater than in other sections, resulting from hard work and small pay, there is a distinct trend toward Socialist doctrines, as well as in Brussels, which is the headquarters of the advocates of that movement. Belgium is one of the strongestholds of Socialism in Europe, but the kind prevalent there is of a very moderate nature; the centres are, besides Brussels, Ghent and Liege. The city government in the last place is in the hands of the Socialists. The two leading parties of Belgium are the Clerical and the Liberal. Christian democracy, which is an offshoot from the Catholic, opposed to the church party, is declining; it is now very small. Belgium's parliament consists of a house of deputies and a senate. There are limitations to franchise in that country. In 1892, there was a general strike for universal suffrage, which amounted almost to a revolution. The government realized that if the demands of the people were not granted, that it would be lost, as it is greatly in its minority. Workmen had no right of franchise; no one could vote who did not possess a certain amount of property. The government consented to grant universal suffrage, and now every man has a vote, but conditions remain just the same. A married man has two votes, a single man one; but property owners have more votes than poor men, thus exercising the same power as before, and holding the situation in their grasp. The members of parliament are elected every four years and the body is almost always in session.

The Army and Young Men.

Belgium is compelled to have 100,000 soldiers in its standing army, by the treaty of 1839 with the powers, France,

Spain, Prussia, Austria and England, when the country separated from Holland. When a young man reaches the age of 20 he is obliged to draw a number. If he gets one so high as to go beyond the limit that is wanted, he is free not to serve at all, but if his number falls within the required list, he has no alternative except to serve. If one has money, he can hire a substitute. If the oldest son of a family gets into the army, the second is free. The third is forced to draw; if he is so fortunate as to escape, then the fourth also has to draw. If there are but four boys in the home, only two have to serve; if three, only one enters the army; never the only son nor the eldest son of a widow. Soldiers are required to serve no longer than five years, but if they wish to enlist at the end of that time they often go as substitutes. As in Germany, an officer can only marry a woman with a certain income. There are three official languages in Belgium—French, German and English. The first is used universally.

Public Schools Since Twelfth Century.

For hundreds of years the public school has been in existence in that land. Its establishment dates as far back as the twelfth century; and at that early day there were public schools even for teaching art. In those times the guilds, composed of the different tradesmen, supported these institutions. Under the Liberal government of recent years some of the higher schools were founded and normals for the training of teachers; but as soon as the clerical party got into power, many of the latter were abolished. There were two of these in Antwerp—one for the boys, the other for girls. In opposition to these, free parochial schools were established under the supervision of the church and under the protection of the government. The church pays the expenses, but the government makes appropriations of money for the support of the schools. In these examinations are not necessary in order to teach; consequently there are very many cases of the ignorance of persons who have little education, and acting as a very beneficent feature of the Liberal government was the law passed which declared that no one should teach who had not passed a satisfactory examination. Prior to that, anybody had a right—a shoemaker or a baker. The nuns who were teaching were notoriously ignorant. When the time for examination of teachers arrives now, the convents send one nun—sometimes two or three—to represent all the others. If these pass, the remaining sisters in the convents are exempt. On a certain occasion, when a nun was being examined, she was asked to give a lesson in geography to the children who had been brought in for purposes of practical demonstration. The nun, who had been educated in a convent, had to acknowledge that she had never seen a map in her life; but she got a certificate and was sent back to her convent to teach. When this incident occurred, a young woman was present who had studied at the Normal at Yegre for three years at the expense of her family, and attended the examination with the object of securing a certificate so as to be qualified as a teacher. The moral effect of the nun's ignorance and its record can easily be

imagined. The English send hundreds of their daughters to Belgium every year to learn the language and to get an education cheaply; the price, for the whole term, amounts to only 400 francs, or \$80. When a nun was asked how they could afford such prices, she said: "It is not for money, but to gain souls." They are wise enough to lay hold upon the young at any sacrifice. The true religion of Catholics is found with the nuns, and not among the priests.

Belgium abounds in noble institutions. There the philanthropic declare that the poor are rich. Different towns and cities have had money left to the municipality for the relief of the indigent. It is often invested in real estate and the income devoted to the wants of the needy, or the funds are so handled as to bring in a revenue from other sources. There are no poor-houses in Belgium. When the poverty-stricken reach a certain age, they receive one franc and a half a week; when they grow as old as 65 they get another pension of 65 francs a year, which comes from the government, regardless of whether the beneficiaries are able to work or not. The aged are glad to get it and makes the young more considerate of them. Every Friday morning the poor go to the bureau of charity and sit in a hall which is reserved for the use of all, both men and women. Each, in turn, their names are taken, and the police, who are appointed for the purpose, inquire into the extent of their necessities. If really in want and worthy of assistance, they are sent to an office in the same building, and there receive money. If the individuals asking help belong to a good family, the funds are sent to them through some friend who represents them. In winter, coal is given to the poor; also substantial food, as well as money. The bureau of charity hands a slip of paper to every needy person asking for help. This is presented at certain shops, and bread, beans, bacon, potatoes and other things are procured. If a workman happens to have a trade which he cannot ply on account of lack

of demand, he goes to the town hall and is engaged to clean the streets, every one is accorded who presents himself. In return for his labor he gets his food and half a franc a day. Belgium has had a history of sorrow through the Spanish Inquisition, its subjection to Austria, and many other bitter experiences, but its bravery in repairing its waste places is worthy of all praise.

BELEA KEARNEY.
Author of "A Slaveholder's Daughter."
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I CURE THESE DISEASES AFTER ALL REMEDIES AND SPECIALISTS HAVE FAILED EVEN TO BENEFIT.

BLOOD POISON, properly termed Syphilis, and familiarly known as "pox," is a disease that infects the blood. It is both hereditary and contagious; the former may appear at birth or at any time thereafter; the latter manifests itself in various stages as primary, secondary, and tertiary. It is needless to explain to its victims the course of this disease, as they realize from its monstrous grasp more than could ever be told. Such evidences as ulcers, the mucous membrane in the mouth and throat, sores on all parts of the body, aching of the bones, spots and all discolorations of the skin signify decay and premature death.

My treatment for Blood Poison is a Specific Serum composition that completely reorganizes the blood corpuscles, by which means every particle of infectious matter is eliminated. This remedy for Blood Poison is the result of many years of experimentation, and has been thoroughly tested in the most severe cases, and has never failed to exterminate the disease that not a sign ever appears. Under my system of treatment it is utterly impossible for poison to remain in the blood, and purity and health are the results in every case. My Specific Serum treatment is by subcutaneous and internal administration, and removes all manifestations of the disease soon after beginning treatment.

STRICTURE of the urethra is a very annoying disease of the Pelvis, and is important because of its harmful effects to the entire genito-urinary system. The most common forms of Stricture are organic, spasmodic and congenital. My Specific Serum treatment accounts for the failure of about 99 per cent of those who claim to cure Stricture.

I treat each case separately, first satisfying myself as to the exact condition by careful examination and inquiry. Stricture in any stage and form is not difficult to cure, and by my method of irrigation, only one session I am able to cure the most severe cases. I do not cut or dilate with bougies, and when I have dismissed a case the canal is sound and healthy and perfectly natural.

NERVOUS DECLINE.—The nerve centers and nerves supply and contribute all the force and activity that the great human structure or any part thereof possesses. The nerve centers are the reservoirs of force, and a tendency to decay of any of the great centers of motion distributes disease to the nerve filaments in that region, and an organic disease is bound to result. All nervous diseases impair the general health; therefore they should have immediate attention and be treated by a competent physician.

In treating Pelvic diseases, from which nearly all nervous disorders originate, I have particular advantages over other physicians because I have a knowledge of the exact location of the great centers of motion, and a course of treatment for Nervous and Sexual Weakness stops drains, emissions, develops the organs and restores complete manhood.

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A SURE CURE is what I will give you just as certain as you employ my services, for I will not accept your money and promise to do anything for you if there is a possible doubt about your case being so complicated and long neglected as not to be within reach of medical science. The certainty of my systems of treatment has been established by their absolute reliability in the many cases I have cured.

PILES or Hemorrhoids are small vascular tumors situated at the lower opening of the bowels, or rectum, and they have a most degrading influence on the general health. I cure Piles without cutting; nor do I use ligatures or caustic acid injections, which treatment has ruined many. My treatment is safe, painless and quick, causing no detention from business, and when you are dismissed by me you are cured for life.

RUPTURE, properly termed Hernia, is an affection in the region of the pelvic system, and is an escape or protrusion of the bowels from the lower part of the abdominal cavity. The tendency of Rupture is always progressive, and the symptoms are usually so slight as not to warn the afflicted, even though in an imminent danger. Rupture frequently results in strangulation and death. Trusses should not be continuously worn, as they only aggravate the trouble.

I have the only sure, safe method for curing Rupture. Besides being absolutely reliable, it is painless and harmless. It makes no difference how bad your Rupture is, and how many times you have been treated. I can cure you, and will guarantee entire satisfaction.

HYDROCELE is an accumulation of serous fluid in the scrotum, or bag, and involves the cords to which the testicles are suspended, and deprives the sexual organs of all vitality. It results from injury, and is sometimes difficult to distinguish from Rupture or Varicocele.

The remedy I use for curing Hydrocele completely obliterates the tumor at once, and by the use of a preparation for a few days, not a sign or symptom of the disease ever reappears.

VARICOCELE is a pelvic disease, and is simply veins surrounding the spermatic cord filled with curdled or stagnant blood similar to varicose veins occurring in any part of the body. This overflow and clogged accumulation is caused by the weakness of the sympathetic or ganglionic nerves that regulate the supply of blood in any organism.

Every man afflicted with Varicocele of long standing knows that it has blighted his life, and that he has made a great mistake in not having himself cured. The disease not only endures by complication every organ of the same region, but by sympathetic irritation destroys the nervous system, and renders a man a complete wreck physically, mentally and sexually.

There is no operation about my radical cure for Varicocele, neither any pain nor detention from business. My procedure consists of absorption, by which means the stagnant blood is transuded into the cellular tissues and finally eliminated from the system. The same method is used in the treatment of the ganglionic nerves are restored to their functional force by the administration of a tonic, and a complete cure is possible in every case.

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